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# Empty Calories: Know the Limits on Salt (Sodium)

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# EMPTY CALORIES

## Know the Limits on Salt (Sodium)

The human body needs only a small amount of salt (sodium). It is used to regulate body fluids and muscle contractions and to help pass on nerve impulses. Only about 200 milligrams of sodium is needed for the body to work. This is the amount of sodium in about  $\frac{1}{10}$  teaspoon of salt! Most of the time, we consume much more than this.

Salt is often added to foods. Only about 11 percent of the sodium in the average U.S. diet comes from adding salt or condiments to foods at home. About 12 percent of the sodium in our diets is in our foods naturally. Most sodium, about 77 percent,

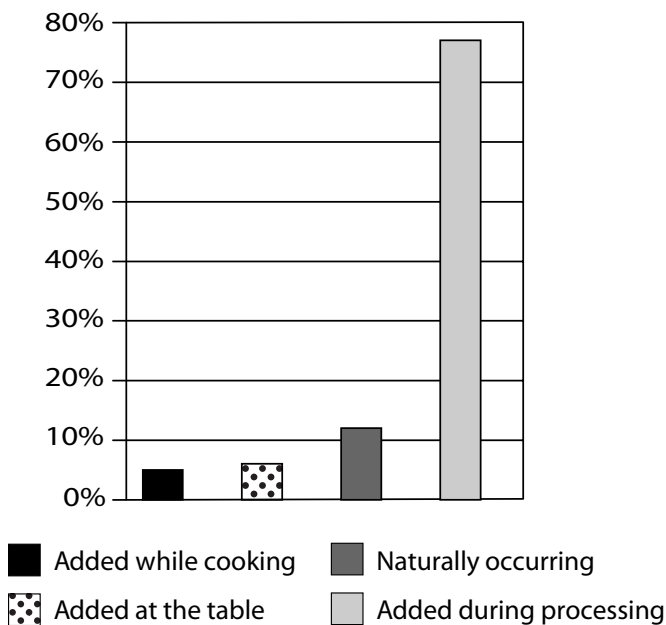


comes from eating processed foods such as canned vegetables, cured meats, and purchased sauces.

### Find the Sodium

Taste alone is not a good guide to the sodium content of foods. Salt on the outside of food, such as a cracker, tastes salty but the food may not be high in sodium. A biscuit may not taste salty, but it can contain 350 milligrams of sodium. The best way to find out the sodium content is to read the Nutrition Facts labels on product packaging. Certain items in the ingredient list can also let you know the food is high in sodium. Look for:

- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Baking soda
- Baking powder
- Disodium phosphate
- Sodium alginate
- Sodium nitrate



Medicines can be a source of sodium. Antacids, laxatives, and some anti-inflammatory drugs may contain large amounts of sodium.

## **Cut It Out!**

Here are some tips for reducing the sodium in your diet:

### **Eat more fresh foods and fewer processed foods.**

The following processed foods are generally high in sodium:

- ▲ Canned soups
- ▲ Prepared sauces and sauce mixes
- ▲ Prepared gravies and gravy mixes
- ▲ Frozen entrees
- ▲ Frozen casseroles
- ▲ Boil-in-bag meals
- ▲ Meal kits
- ▲ Seasoned potato, rice, and noodle mixes
- ▲ Quick breads

Fresh fruits and vegetables are usually low in sodium. Salt is added during canning. Fresh meats are lower in sodium than luncheon meat, cured meats and sausages.

### **Limit use of high-sodium condiments.**

The following condiments are high in sodium:

- ▲ Catsup
- ▲ Mustard
- ▲ Salad dressings
- ▲ Sauces
- ▲ Dips

- ▲ Relish
- ▲ Pickles
- ▲ Olives

### **Use herbs, spices, and other flavorings to enhance foods.**

The following are low-sodium flavorings that can be used in place of salt:

- ▲ Fresh or dried herbs
- ▲ Spices
- ▲ Peppers
- ▲ Lemon juice
- ▲ Zest from lemons or other citrus fruits
- ▲ Vinegar
- ▲ Onion
- ▲ Garlic

Some people use sea salt instead of table salt to season their food. Sea salt contains approximately the same amount of sodium as table salt.

### **Remove salt from recipes whenever possible.**

You can leave out the salt in many recipes without affecting the quality. Soups, stews, casseroles, and other main dishes are often just as tasty without added salt or with less salt. However, omitting salt from baked goods may affect the quality of the product.

### **Purchase lower sodium products.**

You can buy reduced-sodium foods. Reduced-sodium soups, broth, canned vegetables and vegetable juices, processed lean meats, and some condiments can be purchased. Check the Nutrition Facts label to see how much sodium a product contains.

Here is an example of how sodium easily adds up:

Food	Milligrams Sodium
<b>Breakfast</b>	
Scrambled eggs (2 large)	342 mg
Pork sausage, 2 links	336 mg
Whole wheat bread, 1 slice	148 mg
Butter, 2 teaspoons	54 mg
Milk, 8 ounces	126 mg
<b>Total sodium for meal 1,006 mg</b>	
<b>Lunch</b>	
Vegetable Soup, 1 cup	911 mg
Pear (1 cup) and cottage cheese (½ cup) Salad	468 mg
Soda crackers, 4	156 mg
Cola, 12 ounces	21 mg
<b>Total sodium for meal 1,556 mg</b>	
<b>Dinner</b>	
3 ounces catfish, fried	238 mg
Mashed potatoes, ½ cup	182 mg
Cole slaw, ¾ cup	267 mg
Cornbread, 3-inch square	467 mg
Butter, 2 teaspoons	54 mg
Apple pie (1 slice) with ice cream (½ cup)	374 mg
Milk, 8 ounces	126 mg
<b>Total sodium for meal 1,708 mg</b>	
<b>Total sodium for day 4,270 mg</b>	

The USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend that adults eat no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium daily, yet the sample menu above provided 4,270 milligrams.

The following people should eat no more than 1500 milligrams of sodium daily:

- Adults ages 51 and over
- African Americans ages 2 and over
- People over age two with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease

This includes half the total population of America.

#### A Note:

When buying salt, look for iodized salt. This salt has been prepared with iodine to prevent goiter.

#### Good News

Having a taste for salt is learned. It can be changed. To break the salt habit, reduce salt in your diet slowly. Most people find that, after a few weeks of eating less salt, they no longer miss it.

*Written by Jackie Walters, MBA, RD, LD, Extension Specialist for Nutrition Education Programs*

*References: Sodium contents of foods based on data from the USDA Home and Garden Bulletin Number 72, Nutritive Value of Foods.*

*<<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/Data/HG72>>*

*Sodium surplus: Shake the habit for better health, by Mayo Clinic Staff, May 24, 2004, <<http://www.mayoclinic.com>>*

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